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Approved For Release 2005/07/01 : CIA-RDP91-00901R000700090045-6

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Baker Probes Possible Ties Between CIA and Watergate

By Lawrence Meyer
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For several months now, the Senate Watergate committee's ranking Republican, Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, has been directing a closed-door investigation into possible ties between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Watergate affair.

The most recent witness known to have testified before Baker was former CIA director Richard M. Helms, whom Baker had brought back from Tehran, where Helms is U.S. ambassador, to answer questions earlier this month. When he emerged from the closed session after three hours of taking testimony, Baker said only that Helms had been "forthcoming" as a witness.

Baker, the Senate select committee's vice chairman, has at turns been coy and reserved in discussing his investigation suggesting on the one hand in vague public statements that information yet to be revealed may dwarf what is already known about the Watergate affair but then refusing to elaborate on those statements.

"I'm just trying to get all the facts I can," Baker said recently. "I can't make anybody believe that, but it's true." Baker said he is tying up "loose ends" and that he is not "pursuing any theory" concerning the CIA.

(Appearing on the CBS program Face the Nation yesterday, Baker said he has submitted an extensive report on the question of possible CIA involvement in the Watergate coverup to the Watergate committee.

(He refused to reveal what he had found, but added that "it is not a one-line report saying we found no involvement by the CIA. . . . I know more than I'm at liberty to disclose at this moment." He said he has recommended to Senate Watergate Committee chairman Sam Ervin that the material be turned over to the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees.)

"One apparent result of Baker's work was the disclosure, first made on CBS News, that the CIA had destroyed a number of tape recordings at about the same time that it received a request in January, 1973, from Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) to retain all records that might be related to Watergate. Baker had been looking into the tape destruction, but he denied that he was the source of this story.

As a result of the report, Rep. Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.) chairman of the House Armed Service Intelligence subcommittee, requested an explanation from the CIA and said he concluded that CIA had not destroyed any Watergate-related or presidential tape recordings during its January, 1973, housecleaning.

In addition to bringing Nedzi to the defense of the CIA, Baker's probe has clearly annoyed other senior Democrats in Congress. Sen. Stuart Symington, ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services committee, attended the closed session questioning of Helms along with Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), chairman of the Watergate committee.

Although Symington said little to reporters after the session, others present said he was clearly annoyed at the line of questioning that reportedly centered on whether the CIA was involved in the Watergate break-in and whether Helms had any advance knowledge of it.

Ervin declined afterward to say anything about the substance of the questioning, but he left the interview with a ringing endorsement of Helms. "I think Mr. Helms is above reproach in any respect for the years he was with the CIA and since he has been ambassador," Ervin told reporters. "I don't think Mr. Helms has ever done anything wrong in connection with the whole affair."

In one of his occasional statements giving the im-

pression that he is on the verge of discovering or revealing something spectacular, Baker told the Associated Press Managing Editors convention in Orlando, Fla. last Nov. 19 that the American people may have "seen only the tip of the iceberg" concerning the Watergate affair. Invited by a reporter to explain several days later what he had meant, Baker smiled, declined and walked away.

A month later, Baker said on ABC-TV's "Issues and Answers" that if the White House would release information concerning a "matter of grave national importance," then "some of the conduct that appears otherwise unexplainable" could be explained.

When asked during the program if he knew of any more Watergate "bombshells" still unknown to the public, Baker responded ominously, "There are animals crashing around in the forest. I can hear them, but I can't see them."

Last Jan. 23, when the Watergate committee still was planning to hold more public hearings, Baker told his fellow committee members that might call more than a dozen witnesses to testify in closed session, including Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Joint Chiefs of Staffs chairman Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, former CIA director Helms and Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward.

Kissinger and Moorer were among government officials that Baker wanted to question concerning alleged spying by the Pentagon on the National Security Council. Helms and Woodward were among other witnesses whom Baker wanted to question concerning the CIA and its possible involvement in the Watergate affair.

Despite Baker's reluctance to discuss details or the direction of his investigation, a memo from the committee's minority counsel, Fred Thompson, to Baker gives some indication of what Baker is pursuing.

Feb. 20, lists 16 items or

areas where the committee staff "has made and which you have made personally (requests to the CIA) which have not been complied with."

Among the requested items are:

A "Watergate file," prepared by the CIA. Contact reports from CIA case officers who worked with convicted Watergate conspirator Eugenio Martinez, who was also a CIA operative at the time of the Watergate break-in.

Logs or notebooks of technicians or others "indicating the Jan. 21, 1972 order to destroy tapes. Any other logs, notebooks or notations indicating any other destruction or orders to destroy tapes from 1963 to date, including the Jan. 24, 1973 destruction order."

A "Mr. Edward" file the CIA kept on Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., another former CIA employee, who used "Edward" as a pseudonym. And "the extent of CIA activities in Mexico in calendar year 1972."

Thompson's memo goes on to point out that CIA activities in Mexico were "the basis of the Haldeman-Ehrlichman-Helms-Walters controversy."

The issue between former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and former Presidential domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman on the one hand and Helms and deputy CIA director Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters on the other concerns whether the White House tried to use the CIA to impede the FBI's Watergate investigation or whether the White House was legitimately concerned that the FBI would expose CIA operations in Mexico.

Thompson's memo also refers to a request to the CIA concerning "any previous relationship, contact, or reference in files to Bob Woodward." Woodward, along with Carl Bernstein, has done a major portion of The Washington Post's investiga-

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